



Communications Workers of America

For Immediate Release

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Lack of PPE & Unsafe Staffing Remain Issues at MVHS During Second COVID Wave.

UTICA - Healthcare workers at Mohawk Valley Health System's hospitals, represented by the Communications Workers of America, are still facing shortages of adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during this second wave of COVID. CWA members are being forced to reuse N95 masks multiple times, while other hospitals across the state have been able to procure at least 90 days' worth of a stockpile, without any known reports of needing to reuse masks. Additionally, our members have reported not even receiving their own masks to reuse, disregarding the CDC website which clearly states, "N95 respirators must only be used by a single wearer." Darlene Warren, Intensive Care Unit nurse, said, "I know a male doctor who received an N95 mask with makeup inside of it, clearly not his. Imagine wearing a mask for eight or more hours, sneezing or coughing into it, sending it back to get 'sanitized' and then not even getting your own mask back."

A substantial number of healthcare workers at MVHS have recently tested positive for COVID, with the state designating the hospital as a cluster zone. Many of our members believe COVID-19 was contracted due to the improper re-usage of N95 masks. One of our members who recently tested positive, Aleksandar Lazic, NVU nurse, said, "I was tested for Covid 19-and diagnosed with Covid-19. When I got in touch with the employee health department on November 11, I was asked if I had worked in the hospital on Saturday and Sunday, which I had. After stating that I was working, the employee health nurse responded, "It's community acquired COVID-19."

Not only are our members being put at risk by not being provided with adequate armor going into this battle with COVID, patient safety is at risk due to the current staffing shortage. On Friday, November 13, Faxton Saint Luke's Hospital workers delivered a petition on a twenty yard long scroll that asked MVHS to address understaffing. They also delivered a stack of 500 "Assignment Despite Objection" forms which nurses file with their Local Union when they believe their medical license is at risk due to unsafe working situations. Upon delivery of the petition to MVHS' Human Resources Director, Surgery Recovery Room nurse Barb Spudie declared, "When we're short staffed, we are rushed. We become torn between what will be left undone and we hope no harm will come to our patients because of that which we could not do."

Our CWA healthcare workers are demanding that MVHS cease its PPE reuse policy and address the chronic understaffing at the hospital. MVHS must address these issues for the safety of employees, patients and the greater Utica community.